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# Political Rhetorics and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The study employed a qualitative approach in reviewing the extent of political rhetoric as employed by political leaders and government in Nigeria from 1999-date and how such affects sustainable development in the country. The conceptual elucidation of the concepts in the study justifies the rationale of the paper in understanding the misrepresentation of the sustainable indicators of improving the quality of socio-economic life of the people in Nigeria through the deceit policies of the government such as reforms, transformation, change, etc. as used. In conclusion, it asserts that government and governance in Nigeria remain as build on deceitful rhetoric, playing on the vulnerability of the masses and sharp ethnic and religious differences, manipulated for selfish gains and personal aggrandizements. Hence, the recommendation among other things shows that serious political actions must be the hallmarks of government and not mere sweet-coated economic and administrative rhetoric.*

**Keywords:** Language, Politics, Sustainable Development, Rhetoric, Nigeria

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last fifty years of Nigerian development as a nation, the last sixteen year of democratic dispensation (what is chronologically referred to in the political development of Nigeria as the fourth democratic dispensation) have been both lucrative (economy and revenue generation) and most tumultuous in terms of politics, political development, the outcomes to that effects often violence: ethnic, religious and political. The Nigerians that often bear the brunt are ordinary citizens who are already overwhelmed by poor economic situations such as poverty and dearth of socio-economic infrastructures such as schools, road, water, hospitals, recreational facilities etc. Despite the constant government rhetoric in their policies for sustainable development, it has continued to shows ineptitude, poor political will, corruption and mismanagement. The development in Nigeria becomes more gripping in establishing the democratic ideals of sustainable development.

In 1987, the world recognized the need for the redirection of the pattern and outcomes of the global developmental drives, specifically towards more sustainable ventures in the approach and later the concept referred to as sustainable development. However, in an effort to link the issues of economic development and environmental stability, the words such as 'Reform', 'Do or die', 'Transformation', and of recent 'Change' etc. have been variously introduced into politics, governance and government of Nigeria in the last sixteen years. Our concern is that what impacts have these concepts translated in Nigeria development? What are the indicators to those effects? Are such sustainable in the context of sustainable development or such concept a mere political rhetoric? These questions are the guide to this paper which is divided into six parts including this introduction.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL ELUCIDATIONS

To put this paper into perspective the concept variously used in the presentations are briefly explained as follows:

### **Language**

Language is simply the system of communication based upon words and the combination of words into sentences (onlinefreedictionary.com). It is a known fact that Human beings can communicate with each other. We

are able to exchange knowledge, beliefs, opinions, wishes, threats, commands, thanks, promises, declarations, and feelings – only our imagination sets limits. Accordingly, language has been defined as the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consist the use of words in a structured and conventional way (google.com) Most of these facts made human communications distinct, detailed, Conventional, Productivity, comprehensive and expressive. However, in other instances situation arises where language could be not comprehended, displaced, confused, in the example of rhetoric. To this presentation, therefore, Armberg and Vause (2009) assert that language is “foremost a means of communication, communication which almost and always takes place within some sort of social context. Language remains a process which effectively requires an understanding and recognition of the connections between it (language) and the people who use it.

### ***Rhetoric***

The concept of rhetoric has clear definition in the linguistic circle but understand differently in social and general usage. According to Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary (7th edition) defined rhetoric as speech or writing that is intended to influence people, but that is not completely honest or sincere. Roskelly (u.d) as observed that the traditional definition of rhetoric, first proposed by Aristotle, and embellished over the centuries by scholars and teachers, is that, rhetoric is the art of observing in any given case the “available means of persuasion.” Hence the Nigerian government perceived that persuasion over the year drumming supports for policies, programs and actions such as SAP, currency devaluations, privatization of public utilities and resources, fuel subsidies removal etc., even when such are proved to be conditioned or embellished with corruption and even when it is against the wishes of the masses such as the cases in 2012 of fuel subsidy brouhaha. Accordingly, Roskelly (u.d) have positioned effective process and relation involved in rhetoric as that of: speakers to hearers, hearers to subjects, speakers to subjects. But most importantly, the scholar argued that most successful, writers use what Aristotle and his descendants called the appeals: logos, ethos, and pathos.

### ***Politics***

The concept of politics has a fairly understanding and implications as it affects this presentation. In several dispositions in this regards whether as the fabulous Lasswell saying that it refers to “who gets what, when and how”, the Estonian “authoritative allocation of values for a society” and in Max Weber assertion that “politics is the operation of state and its institutions” (quoted in Anifowose and Enemuo,1999), politics as played in Nigeria over the years and more critical in the last decade, could not be better defined or illustrated. However, we could for the purpose of this discuss define politic cited in (Anifowose and Enemuo,1999) as a process by which men debate matters concerning the ‘polis’ the political community and take action in an attempt to realize the public interest or the common good.

### ***Sustainable Development***

The concept of sustainable development is the in-thing in the anal of political and development of the world. The most accepted definition of the concept remains “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987, p. 43 cited in EMA, 2015). The Centre for Environment Education (2007) provided concise implications of this definition in it exposition of the concept as “economic growth together with the protection of environmental quality, each reinforcing the other.” Robert Prescott Allen clearly put sustainable development in context when he described it, as just another way of saying “the good life” as a combination of (a) a high level of human well-being, and (b) the high level of ecosystem well-being that supports it. We subscribed to this understanding in this presentation.

### ***Development***

Development according to Walter Rodney (1972) is a multifaceted phenomenon. It could imply progress, transformation, change and ability to innovate or use new skills or ideas. Development involves freedom, independence, improved literacy, good leadership, viable economy and market, access and ability to use resources and tools, ability to control disease and stay healthy, use of iron and steel etc. (Rodney, 1976). Many years after Rodney’s assertions on development in the evergreen piece How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, developing countries in African and Nigeria in particular are still engulfed with the negative challenges of developing, and hence termed underdeveloped nation.

## **3. THE MATTERS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL RHETORIC IN NIGERIA**

It is argued that sustainable development is the maintenance of a balance between the human need to improve lifestyles and feeling of well-being on one hand, and preserving natural resources and ecosystems, on which we and future generations depend (Abdullahi and Adama, 2014). Leiserowitz (2005) described the thrust of the concept as in length as follow:

Despite an on-going debate on the actual meaning, a few common principles tend to be emphasis. The first is a commitment to equality and fairness, in that priority should be given to improving the conditions of the world's poorest and decisions should account for the right of the future generations. The second is a long-term view that emphasizes the precautionary principle, i.e where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage; lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measure to prevent environmental degradation. Third, sustainable development embodied integration, and understanding and acting on the complex interconnections that exist between the environment, economy and society. This is not a balancing act or a playing of one issue off against the other, but recognizing the interdependent nature of these three pillars.

The implications of Leiserowitz understanding of the concept sustainable development as depicted have critical implications for resources (human and natural) in Nigeria. The decades of state mismanagement of precious resources have combined to define the nation as rich while its citizens are poor (Aigbokhan, 2008 and Ucha, 2010). A scandalous example to this regards was in 2014 when the nation's Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) alleged non-remittance of USD 20 billion to the nation's revenue coffers. In the following year also plethora of corruption revelation in state agencies such as aviation ministry, pension, police, and NNPC in particular and in the saga popularly referred to as the petroleum subsidy scam amounting to some four trillion naira (4trillion). Nigeria remains largely a mono-culture economy, build largely on crude-oil exploration and exportation. Around, 2014 the crude-oil price came crashing, with it the revenue generation capacity in Nigeria. Such move reinforced the theory of vulnerability of mono-culture economy to volatilities internal and especially the global ones such as world economic systems, politics, science and technology.

Such as a matter of national development in country like Nigeria, the consideration in assessing and explaining social, political and economic development as intended in this presentation is aptly captured in Roskelly's (u.d) exposition that: we employ rhetoric whether we're conscious of it or not, but becoming conscious of how rhetoric works can transform speaking, reading, and writing, making us more successful and able communicators and more discerning audiences. And perhaps, such ability will make use for critical, political conscious and active in our actively transforming nation.

According to the National Population Commission (2006) census, Nigeria had a population of 160 million people with an annual growth rate of 3%. Unofficial statistics are variously putting the figures of Nigerians population as 180million people. Such figure is variously put to incorporate about 250-500 different ethno-linguistics and cultural groups (Chuku and Abdullahi, 2015). The issue of unity remains a daunting challenge among the various ethnic and religious group fifty five years after independence. Conflict and violence manifesting in ethno-religious sense are recurrent phenomena. This ugly development is exacerbated by the raising poverty level, 70% of Nigerians lives below \$1 a day (Oshewolo, 2010 and Ugwuorah and Imegi, 2012). In addition the literacy level is periling, as the nation's enrollment level soar amidst, dearth of infrastructure in institutions of learning. Such often result into masses failure in regional and national examinations like WAEC and NECO (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

Other social and demographic indicators especially in rural areas (which harbours some 60% of the populations of Nigerians), like maternal mortality, infant and child mortality are seriously depressing. Most like of critical social and economic infrastructures: motorable roads, electricity, hospitals/ PHCs, telecommunications etc. affecting the nations in general is most alarming in the rural areas. In the urban areas general unemployment and youth unemployment in particular are more striking. Hence, squalors, congestions, crime such as kidnapping, armed-robbery, militancy and rape are prone. Of recent militancy in the form of insurgency by the dreaded Islamist group known as Boko-Haram have inflicted untold devastation and hardship to people in the north-east of Nigeria and Nigeria at large, while intermittently bombing targets such as police and military installation/establishment, religious centers, schools, media house etc in the urban centers like Abuja, and exposed the nation's security as on the one hand having serious tools, logistics and commitments to professionalism problems, while on the other hand exposing loopholes and corruption in the mismanagement of the nation's military and security in general. In education, most of the nation's tertiary institutions of learning through the teachers bodies are engaging in one or two forms of strikes and it antecedents' consequences to learning and products of the educational sectors. Even as the unfortunate children still scavenge on the streets as beggars or are abused in one form or the other.

Nonetheless, the last 16 years has witnessed unprecedented revenue generation for the nation Abubakar and Okongwu (2008) demonstrated a contrast in the years of government revenue generations in the nations as follows:

the federally collected revenue for 1970-1980, 1985-1993, 1994-1998, and 1999-end may 2007 were respectively N105,436 billions, N716,811 billion, N 2,240,246 billion, and N27,764 billion. In effects,

while some 2,3 percent of total federally collected revenue was attributed to the nine-years period 1985-1993, 90 percent, the predominant bulk, was received in the eight and half years 1999-end-May 2007.

Still more revenues are justified to have been raised by the Nigerian state after 2007 to date. Yet the state fiscal responsibilities dwindle partly owing to the neo-liberal economy stance of the new democratic governments, the impact of corruption, economic mismanagement, personal **aggrandizements**, etc. exhibited by politician and their government agents have combined to thwart the hands of development in Nigeria and exacerbated unsustainable tendency in the youths such as get-rich-quick syndromes, yahoo-culture, 419, baby factory, human trafficking, Boko- Haram, ritual killing, cultism and other maladies. Still, government and politicians in Nigeria will suggest development, progress, transformation, change based on policies and programmes that are supposedly implemented. Such rhetoric is an exposé in political campaign, rallies and auspices such as the yearly independence celebrations or other public galore in the continents or in the globe, but on the ground in the nations the realities often depicts the contrast.

Kamalu and Agangan (2011) study of the political rhetoric of the president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan PDP government revealed a conscious deployment of diverse rhetorical strategies by the President to articulate an alternative ideology for the Nigerian nation, using a variety of persuasive strategies such as appeal to ethno-religious sentiments, alignment with the suffering majority of the country, and reconstruction of childhood experiences to entreat and manipulate the conscience of his party and other Nigerians. In a more elaborate form, Alo (2012) study of African leaders political rhetoric reveals that African political leaders generally acknowledge the socio-economic problems of Africa and the need for change, with four dominant ideological preoccupations emerging from them which are: (a) economic growth and independence in Africa, (b) national unity and nationalism, (c) globalism and (d) self-reliance while recurring persuasive strategies include greetings, the use of pronouns, modalities and contrasts. Alo (2012) thus conclude that by such leader, little attention, however, appears to be paid to the ways and means of achieving the goals of socio-economic independence and recovery.

### **Moving Forward**

Language reflects both the individual characteristics of a person, as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her community (Amberg and Vause, 2009). While Nigeria is a multi-cultural entity, its history and colonial experiences have made English language as official language along the three dominant and populous languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The implication of English language to the national development have been variously studied and demonstrated (Abdullahi, 2012, Ker, 2010, Udofot, 2010, Omodiaogbe, 1999). It just suffices to say it remains the official political, governance and administrative language in the nations, however complex that could be to the majority of the general population. Still there is no respite to English as medium of communication and in Nigeria, though the elites have wittingly find rhetoric to the effects of English diminutive use among the populous resulting into poor comprehension, passivity, and disinterest in state policies, programmes and actions (owing largely to illiteracy and uninformed knowledge of government, governance and statutory functions of the state by the masses). Hence, as Roskey (u.d) demonstrated, in using rhetoric: writers (in this case the elite, leaders, politicians in Nigeria) use ethos when they demonstrate that they are credible, good-willed, and knowledgeable about their subjects, and when they connect their thinking to readers' own ethical or moral beliefs... however, in Nigeria, speakers or leaders utterances or actions could contradicts the ethos in rhetoric as Tenuche (2009) revealed aptly:

It can however correctly be inferred from President Olusegun Obasanjo's rhetoric prior to the 2007 general elections in Nigeria that the option for citizens to determine who rules them was foreclosed as he was determined to select his own successor. This is evidenced in the nature of the public statements and speeches that he made and the thrust of which tended to be abusive, intimidating, authoritarian and threatening. The President's rhetoric naturally evoked responses from the informed public with grave implications for the nature and conduct of the elections. The outcome of the elections has been adjudged by both National and International observers as "deeply flawed" as the entire process was marked by irregularities and violence with serious implications for the fledging democratic institutions and culture being built in Nigeria.

The 2007 elections thus defined in the history of politics, political crisis and violence is nothing in magnitude compared to the aftermaths of 2011 elections and outcomes there which leaves dreadful thoughts in the imagination of any objective observer. However, the elections in the politics in 2015 of garage thugs, almajiris, clueless and dead brains, orubeberism and jegazarism, change etc rhetoric leading to the emergence of first peaceful civilian to civilian transition and the expository plethora of corruption at the highest of previous government is a development worth the rhetoric.



Nonetheless, an informed citizenry is remains the panacea for good governance and sustainable development in which Gambose in Ker (2010) maintained that:

It is true to say that there cannot be good governance unless the governed can participate effectively in the political process, and such participation involves having access to adequate informant. It also means knowing, and being able to exercise, ones right. To do this, a citizen needs access and that access can only be in a language he or she knows well.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing development in Nigeria, the uninterrupted 17 years of democracy embellished in political and governmental slogans more rich in their connotations than in how they impact on the life of the citizens. In this respect cut-throat-politics, politics base on appeals to ethnic and cultural sentiments, heightened by monumental, corruption and mismanagement. What the majority of the citizens especially the masses earned in this year remains poverty, rising unemployment, violence crisis, death and destructions. Hence, sustainable development in the context of the nation seems a mirage.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATION**

- 1) Government and politicians must be more politically conscious and sincere to the issues of nation building and development.
- 2) Serious political actions must be the hallmarks of government and not mere sweet-coated economic and administrative rhetoric.
- 3) Resources used in Nigeria occasion by brazen corruption remains the bane of Nigeria's development. The future must always be mirrored by the government in terms of sustainable.
- 4) The illiteracy rate is not acceptable, such have hampered learning, awareness, informed citizenry which complicated and exacerbated challenges of national development.

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